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NSC BRIEFING

29 December 1960

BACKGROUND

BELGIAN STRIKES

I. Ten-day Socialist-instigated strikes spreading today.

A. Strikes are protest against proposed economic austerity bill of Prime Minister Eyskens' Social Christian (catholic)-Liberal government to offset loss of Congo.

1. Bill calls for increased taxes and reduced social welfare expenditures to offset loss of Congo revenues.
2. Opposition Socialist leadership, originally reluctant, now heavily committed to strike.
3. Socialists trying to force Eyskens to reconvene parliament, hoping parliament under mounting pressure will defeat bill, also possibly cause downfall of government.

B. Violence and demonstrations increasing but no one killed as yet.

1. Massive demonstrations expected in Brussels today.
2. Government has brought back six Infantry companies from Germany and plans to bring 10 more.

C. Strikes virtually general in southern (Walloon) industrial area, partial in Brussels and somewhat less effective in Flemish cities (Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges).

1. But Socialists are endeavoring to extend strikes into Brussels and Flemish country. Strikes spreading there today.

II. Stability of the Eyskens' government not threatened as long as the Roman Catholic trade unions continue to refuse to strike.

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- A. Organized labor is divided approximately equal between Roman Catholic and Socialist trade unions.
 - 1. Socialists strong in Walloon south, while Roman Catholics strength is in Flemish north.
 - B. Rank-and-file Roman Catholic trade unionists appear so far to be generally obeying leaders decision (27 December) remain on jobs.
 - 1. But continued support may depend upon government modifying its austerity bill.
 - a. There have been negotiations between the Roman Catholic Federation (CSC) and the government.
- III. Efforts are being made to find settlement.
- A. Socialist trade unions do not have any substantial "war chest" and Socialist leaders do not want to create bad feeling between Socialist and Roman Catholic rank-and-file.
 - 1. Would adversely effect any future cabinet cooperation.
 - B. Eyskens government's chances of survival practically nonexistent if Roman Catholic trade unions desert party.
 - C. King--honeymooning in Spain--is standing by and may be obliged to intervene if situation deteriorates.
 - 1. Could call in principal leaders for consultations.

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